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ABSTRACT

Descriptive data from the first three years of a five year longitudinal study of immigrant adolescents are presented in this report. The 30 bilingual students studied represent 20 countries and 13 languages. Students were administered the Self-Description Blank which measures the ratio of success to failure on an Eriksonian task of identity versus identity confusion. Data suggested that during the past three years, students exhibited steady and positive growth. Differences within the group, however, required analyses of individual cases. These analyses are presented in this report. The data are viewed as providing a baseline for theory building for normative research about the identity development process of bilingual immigrant adolescents. Tables of data are appended. (Author/MK)

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THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS IN THE BILINGUAL IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENT'S IDENTITY SEARCH

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THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS IN THE BILINGUAL IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENTS' IDENTITY SEARCH

ABSTRACT

To be reported are descriptive data from a five-year longitudinal study with immigrant adolescents (N = 30). The participants represent 20 distinct countries and 13 languages. Students were administered the Self-Description Blank (McClain, 1975) measuring the ratio of success to failure on the Eriksonian task of identity versus identity confusion. Results for the past three years suggest steady and positive growth. Differences within the group required analysis of individual cases. Although no diffinitive conclusions are drawn, the author suggests this is necessary and descriptive data for theory building and a better understanding of the identity development process for bilingual immigrant adolescents.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS IN THE BILINGUAL IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENTS' IDENTITY SEARCH

INTRODUCTION

Immigrants and adolescents are two special populations in American society. Both experience a period of disorientation as a result of changes brought about by an "uprooting" over which they have little control. In fact, adolescence and the immigration experience can be characterized as transitory life stages, significant turning points in an individuals total life development. Perhaps the one task that points further to their similarity is that of articulating a sense of personal identity. For the immigrant adolescent, consolidating past, present and future self-images in progressing towards self definition is complicated by cultural discontinuity.

The purpose of this paper is to report empirical data describing identity development for bilingual immigrant adolescents (N = 30). The participants came from different cultural backgrounds and left their homeland at the onset or in the midst of adolescence. Two assumptions underlying the study were: (1) their identity crisis (for immigrant adolescents) would be compounded by several factors, i.e., culture, language, ethnicity and race; and (2) as a result of this simultaneous psychological and sociocultural uprooting, the task of identity formation would take a longer time to be resolved. A review of the literature had revealed no studies with particular reference to the normal psychological development of immigrant adolescents. Consequently, the longitudinal findings to be reported can be considered baseline research and perhaps give impetus to further investigations.

IDENTITY LITERATURE

According to Erik Erikson, to study the psychology of adolescents is to study a "natural" period of uprootedness in human life. Central to his theory

is the concept of identity formation, the principal developmental task of adolescence. In simple dictionary terms, identity is defined as the "sameness of essential or generic character in different instances" (Webster's New International Dictionary, 1961, p. 1123). The quality of retaining sameness in the process of change is Erikson's way of looking at the concept he has formulated and described. Identity connotes the "resiliency of maintaining essential patterns in the process of change" (Erikson, 1964, p. 96). These changes occur as a result of ongoing life stages, the historical situation and environmental shifts. In the theory of psychosocial development, identity versus identity confusion or role diffusion represent the nuclear conflict to be resolved by teenagers. Adolescence is the time in one's life when plans, goals and ideologies for the future will be formulated and when both old and new identifications must be combined into a unique wholeness and individuality. Erikson suggests that each society and each culture institutionalizes a certain moratorium for the majority of its young people in order that they may be able to decide who and what they will be. Not all researchers of adolescence have agreed with this perspective. Cultural anthropologists suggest that Erikson's view of the identity crisis is valid only for middle class Western society and not for many children, e.g., those growing up in the ghettoes of North Africa or others growing up under conditions of poverty (Enker, 1971). "When social conditions require the child to participate in his adults' labors and concerns from early life on... a moratory existence... is ipso facto excluded," states Carl Frankenstein of Hebrew University in Jerusalem (Enker, 1971, p. 372). He argues that children growing up under these conditions will never have the "limbo" between childhood and adulthood where they can experiment with different roles and principles. Frankenstein also concludes that identity is formed prior to adolescence which may, in effect, be better termed the result

of socialization or cultural teaching rather than development. Corroborating his views are the opinions of the anthropologist, Ruth Benedict. Her studies of Samoans indicate that there is no moratorium. "The rites of passage symbolically embody a child with adult responsibilities, roles and status. Child behaviors emerge into adult behaviors because the child is not taught behaviors he must unlearn" (Benedict, 1934, p. 29).

These opposing views of the identity crisis were further cause to wonder about the immigrants. Perhaps they had developed a sense of identity as a result of cultural socialization as suggested by Frankenstein. With their arrival at the onset or in the midst of adolescence, would this moratorium apply? Many of the subjects were from traditional Asian and Hispanic cultures. Had they already assumed adult responsibilities and were they expected to carry on likewise in America? Questions about role models were also raised. The adolescent, who as a child imitated and patterned his parents and others upon whom he depended, now had new sources of identification. Because this is America, it was expected that some or most of these figures would not be ethnospecific. With all of these influences and forces, the immigrant's established sense of identity might more easily be shakened or challenged. Inherent ethnic, linguistic and racial characteristics were being scrutinized and assessed by outsiders for the first time.

Ethnic, Linguistic and Racial Identity

For many adolescents, race, ethnicity and language compound the identity issue. Contemporary research (Brody, 1968; Mostwin, 1972; and Sommers, 1964) on adolescents of dual cultural membership report that they are trying to resolve the cultural conflict of being part American and part "foreigner" living in a predominantly Anglo-American, English-speaking society. Asians and some Puerto Ricans, for example, have distinctive characteristics that

cast them into separate racial subgroups as well as minority language groups. For those of minority status it may be difficult to be American if they have been made to feel inferior or different. According to Erikson, "one is apt to fuse the negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with his own negative identity" (Erikson, 1966, p. 155). In speaking about the concept of identity in race relations, he considers the impact of social class and culture. Erikson states that minority members may feel alienated from the world to which they were born and the country of which they are a citizen yet surrounded by the successful valuesof that world and country, how can they define themselves?

This researcher wondered if these were feelings possibly also experienced by immigrant adolescents. How did those other identity-related characteristics affect the adolescents in this research study? How did they feel about their ethnic background, their home language and their race? They came from countries where they had been part of the "majority" group and where they freely spoke a non-English language. Orientals and Blacks are the visible races in the Far East and the Carribean Islands respectively. Many of the immigrant adolescents were now in the minority. They also experienced open prejudice for the first time. How did they feel about themselves under these new circumstances? Did they feel less secure or uncertain because of changes experienced as a result of immigration? It was assumed that the immigrants were evaluating themselves in relation to the American English-speaking majority. How did these factors affect their sense of identity? There was still another question about how the resolution of other adolescent issues would be affected by their immigrant status. For the immigrant adolescent, the identity crisis would appear to take on additional complexities.

Relevant Identity Development Literature

Identity formation with a sample of black and white lower socio-economic class boys was investigated by Hauser (1972). The results of his longitudinal study disclosed that the black and white adolescents have distinctive patterns of identity formation. The blacks were characterized by unchanging configurations of self-images. These remained strikingly stable over the years. In contrast, the white youth "displayed a progressive integration of different self-images and stabilization of the content of these images" (p. 113). The patterns among the blacks were consistent with the definition of identity foreclosure, a disruption in ego identity development while whites' patterns were consistent with "progressive identity formation" (p. 113). According to Hauser, these findings also suggest that both sociocultural and cognitive aspects of racial differences impact identity development. The black youngster is confronted with devalued racial stereotypes and an impoverishment of role models" (p. 126). These constricting forces diminish the adolescent's prospectus for a positive sense of identity.

"An Eriksonian Cross Cultural Study of Adolescent Development" (McClain, 1975) investigated differences among adolescents in terms of Erikson's developmental tasks. The 2609 subjects came from six communities, four in Europe and two in the United States and were divided into three age groups: early adolescence (12-13); middle adolescence (14-16); and late adolescence (17-18). The Self-Description Blank designed by McClain (1975) was used to assess the ratio of success to the sense of failure related to the first six Eriksonian stages.

The identity measure showed results varying according to age groups. Those in the 14-16 year old category had lower scores than the other two groups appearing "to reflect their shaken confidence and disequilibrium as

they grapple with the difficult task of learning who they are (McClain, 1975, p. 532). The higher scores for the 17-18 year olds seemed to indicate movement towards the development of a sense of identity.

McClain's findings provide evidence that the different Western cultures do foster varying levels of support for the "developmental experiences of the young" (p. 541). Requiring further investigation is how the sociocultural settings affect the developmental processes.

These studies, although not using immigrant samples, had relevance for this research for the following reasons: (1) they sought to describe identity development for adolescents of minority status experiencing the influence of two cultures and; (2) through empirical findings they suggested the universality of the identity formation task among cross cultural adolescent populations.

METHODOLOGY

To be described are only the longitudinal data about identity for the immigrant adolescents. The complete study (Arredondo-Dowd, 1978) also investigated ego development and moral reasoning and field tested an experimental curriculum with four groups of American born and immigrant adolescents. Only findings for two groups of immigrants, the experimental (A) and the control (B) will be reported.

Sample

The participants (N = 30) came from twenty different ethnic backgrounds and represented thirteen language groups. Some of their home countries were Columbia, Jamaica, Korea, Iran, Israel, Spain and the Soviet Union. All of the students spoke English as a second language, were between the ages of 15 and 19, had been in the country five years or less and were academically oriented. There were 13 males and 17 females and their parents had emigrated for economic, educational, and in some cases, political reasons. Basically

Groups A and B look very much alike with the exception of average years in the United States and the slightly greater number of females than males (see Table I).

(Insert Table I about here)

Setting

This study was conducted in two communities bordering Boston. The first town is highly residential with a population of more than 50,000. Historically, it has been well-known for strong commitments to education. The high school provided all subjects in the control groups and twelve of the subjects in the experimental group. It is a comprehensive school with an enrollment of 2100, rich in ethnic, racial and socioeconomic diversity. There are sections of the town heavily Jewish, Irish, and Chinese. More recently, there has been an influx of immigrants from all over the world. Special English classes and an American History course have been developed to meet the needs of the growing population who speak English as a second language. The school offers a wide range of courses (465) to meet the needs of all students.

Five members of the experimental group came from a college city bordering Boston. Very cosmopolitan, with diverse ethnic settlements and a considerable blue collar representation, the city population approximates 200,000. The students attended the main high school which had recently merged with the vocational school. Student enrollment approximated 2400. To meet the needs of the diverse language groups, a bilingual program has been administered on a K-12 basis since 1975. It is available to Greek, Portuguese, French, Haitian, Spanish and a few Chinese-speaking students.

Instruments

The Self-Description Blank (SDB) was selected after lengthy investigation and after pilot efforts as the most appropriate measure of identity. Developed

by McClain (1975), it is based on Erikson's developmental theory and is designed to assess the ratio of success to failure for the first six Eriksonian stages. 2609 adolescents were involved in McClain's cross cultural empirical investigation. The SDB was translated into Spanish and German for use in the non-English speaking communities.

The test has 70 items divided into 14 separate scales of five statements. Two of the scales are used to identify subjects whose self-protective attitudes might invalidate their response. The twelve scales and an illustrative statement from each follow:

Basic trust versus Mistrust	I feel that life is just great. I worry about the future.
Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt	I do a good job about taking care of my own affairs. I doubt that my decisions are right.
Initiative versus Guilt	People look to me for new and exciting ideas. I am afraid to really let myself go.
Industry versus Inferiority	I try to do a good job at school or work. There aren't many things I can do well.
Identity versus Role Diffusion	It feels right to be the person that I am. I don't seem to belong anywhere.
Intimacy versus Isolation	It is easy for me to get to know people very well. I wish that people showed more affection to me.

(McClain, 1975)

Subjects respond to the items on a scale of zero through ten, from never true to always true. The positive (success) score for each subject is divided by the negative (failure) score at each stage to provide the ratio of success to failure. McClain has recently come upon an easier way of interpreting the scores. It is by finding the percent positive of the sum of positive and negative scores for each scale. For example, the score for

identity would be divided by the sum of the scores for identity and role diffusion, i.e., $\frac{\text{Identity}}{\text{Identity + Role Diffusion}}$.

The present revision (1975) of the measure has test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from .71 to .93 for individual scale scores and from .88 for ratio scores. Comparative studies that point to satisfactory validity with the Self-Description Blank include: institutionalized versus non-delinquents and clients at university counseling centers versus non-client university students before and after a mental health course designed to facilitate self-actualization.

Research Design and Findings

For the complete study, as previously described, a quasi-experimental research design was used to assess the effects of the experimental curriculum as a stimulus of psychological development. To be reported here are only the identity findings for the two immigrant groups (A & B) for the past three years. Because a five year study is projected, the findings are incomplete and thus will not be statistically analyzed until that time. In this discussion, findings among and within the groups will be described. Clinical evidence will also be introduced to clarify individuals' identity status.

In the original study, the Self-Description Blank was administered on a pretest and a posttest basis (see Table II). The data showed that there were no significant differences between the two immigrant groups. That is, the experimental curriculum did not affect the individuals' identity development as had been anticipated. In fact, the group means indicate minimal change over the five month period of intervention. A cause for speculation were the group differences.

The Self-Description Blank proposed to assess the ratio of success to failure for the Eriksonian task of identity formation. From these initial

data it appeared that Group A, at this point in time, was less successful than Group B in resolving this adolescent task. What might account for these differences? This question among others gave impetus to the longitudinal study.

(Insert Table II about here)

Follow-Up Data

The immigrant adolescents have completed the protocols for the past two years. They were told that their assistance would be needed until 1981. The number of original participants in Groups A and B totaled 30. In 1978, 25 completed the follow-up questionnaires, and 24 responded in 1979. It is anticipated that this number will remain around 25 for the remainder of the study. The exact location of all but three of the immigrants is known.

Essentially, the yearly gain scores suggest that growth is occurring in identity for both groups (see Table III). That Group B is less confused about identity than the experimental class has always been reflected in the data.

(Insert Table III about here)

DISCUSSION

There are several factors that may account for differences between the groups: (1) Group A students have been heterogenous in their postsecondary plans. Although the majority have continued educationally, they chose technical, liberal arts and professional (nursing) career programs. All persons but one in Group B are attending four year colleges (see Table IV); (2) It appears that there are two umbrella cultural groups to which members of the experimental class can be assigned. They are Asian and Latino (Hispanic Carribean). Typically, there is a maintenance of traditional roles for men and women from these backgrounds. By going on educationally, the immigrants may be

satisfying parental expectations while challenging socially learned behavior and thus creating personal conflict; (3) Group A students have been in the United States less time than their counterparts. This may mean that they are still wrestling to a greater degree with some of the issues around loss of homeland, acceptance by Americans and identification with a different cultural mileau. Meanwhile, they are confronted with the tasks of preparing for a career, establishing satisfying personal relationships and living up to their parent's expectations. Clinical data for individual participants suggests the on-going struggle in the identity development task.

Sample Cases

Carlos was 16 when he came from Colombia to join his mother who was working as a housekeeper. School posed many problems because of his limited English ability but he worked conscientiously with teachers willing to give him extra help. Socially, Carlos made many friends. His charismatic personality made him very likeable and easily accepted by both immigrant and American-born students. As an outstanding player on the school's soccer team, he received additional positive regard. To Carlos, there was no question about going to college. Clearly, he came to the United States to have access to educational opportunities. At the time he started college his performance on the SDB was higher than most of his peers (77) indicating a greater degree of success than failure with the identity formation task. In the past two years, his scores have dropped ten points suggesting perhaps that his sense of identity is being shaken. Carlos has admitted being less sure of his career goals. He sees American university students not academically serious. His minority status in this setting is further reinforced. Carlos realizes that there are not many other Hispanics in college. His philosophy course has stimulated him to question the meaning of life. He wonders about the inequities that people must

face. Carlos has always expressed the desire to return to Colombia to assist his town's people. Now he wonders about doing this on his own in light of existing sociopolitical realities. Earlier fantasies seem to be diminishing. It appears that Carlos' confusion about his identity is being influenced by multiple factors and that he is struggling to sort them out.

Maria and Joseph are a brother and sister from a family of ten children. Their working class parents brought them from one of the Caribbean Islands nearly five years ago so that they could realize a better life and educational opportunities. In both Maria and Joseph can be seen the racial influences of Black, Indian and Spanish predecessors on the Islands. The neighborhood in which they settled is in fact racially mixed and populated by both Hispanics and Blacks. Maria and Joseph were very successful in high school and had little difficulty with the English language because they had studied it previously. They sang in the school choir and Joseph played with the school band. Throughout high school and during the summers they worked to support their college studies. Maria received the Martin Luther King School Scholarship her senior year. There seems to be a great family support and encouragement to the children to develop themselves. Although their home is only a few miles away, they board at one of the local universities. Since the beginning of the study Maria's sense of identity has steadily increased according to SDB data (77-80-85). Her scores are the highest and most consistent among females in the experimental group. In conversation, Maria exudes self-confidence and satisfaction with her career plans. Although she admits that the work is difficult, she is determined to pursue graduate study. Her optimism is buoyed by past successful experiences and positive family support which she seems to have incorporated. It is as though internally, Maria is very satisfied with who she is.

Brother Joseph has experienced a different process in identity development. SDB Scores of 40-77-74 indicate an uneveness yet forward movement. It appears

that Joseph was most confused at the end of his senior year. In fact then he expressed concerns about pursuing art as a career. Perhaps he was not receiving the needed positive regard which then challenged his self-esteem and vocational choice. Super (1951) describes vocational choice as an expression of self-concept. In Joseph's case, his career decision was not supported. Thus he looked inside himself to sort out this incongruency and threat to self-identification. University studies have made a difference in his attitude toward his vocation. He now talks more confidently and enthusiastically about art. He is enjoying what he is doing and is getting the support of fellow art students as well. Their positive regard has encouraged and buoyed his self confidence. In conversation last year he said things couldn't be better. Vocation does play a big role in the identity development process. No doubt other factors are operating, i.e., maturity; yet in this case, vocational choice was critical to identity.

With other participants such as Carlos, Maria and Joseph, extensive interviewing will occur in the last two years of the study. This is an attempt to gather additional data that may help us to further understand and clarify the immigrants' identity status.

CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary findings of this longitudinal study are beginning to provide much needed normative research about the developmental process of bilingual immigrant adolescents in their identity search. Though speculative and idiographic, they are the necessary baseline and descriptive data for theory building in this area. They assist to help define and to deliniate variables that are important. As a result, hypotheses can be made and tested in an attempt to understand the nature of this complex task for immigrant adolescents and the issues that surround it. There are many factors to consider. The

immigrants have experienced at least three cultures (e.g., Jamaica, American, and adolescence) and two languages (e.g., Portuguese and English) as part of their coming of age. Most of us found adolescence in one culture and one language sufficiently unnerving. These immigrants seem to offer us a unique portal in the resiliency of youth, living unaided in another culture. The data should remind us, as researchers, that there is much to learn in the way to building a new area of research.

TABLE I

IMMIGRANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

GROUP	N	FEMALES	MALES	AVERAGE YEARS IN USA
A	17	8	9	2.5
B	13	9	4	3.1

TABLE II

PRE AND POSTTEST SCORES FOR IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

GROUP	PRETEST	POSTTEST	CHANGE SCORES
A	59.25	59.44	.19
B	70.92	70.46	-.45

TABLE III

SUMMARY OF GROUP MEANS FOR IDENTITY

JUNE, 1977 - JUNE, 1979

	IDENTITY		
	1977	1978	1979
GROUP A (experimental)	M = 59.44	M = 63.14	M = 66.00
GAIN SCORES		+3.70 pts.	+2.86 pts.
GROUP B (control)	M = 70.45	M = 78.80	M = 76.00
GAIN SCORES		+8.34 pts.	-2.80 pts.

TABLE IV

POST SECONDARY STATUS

GROUP	TWO YEAR SCHOOL	FOUR YEAR SCHOOL	WORK	ARMED FORCES	UNKNOWN
A	1	12	2	1	1
B	1	12	0	0	0

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